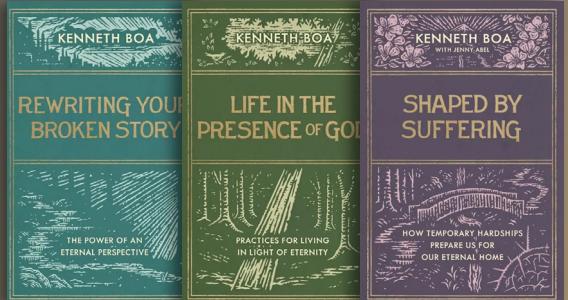


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## GOD AND HIS BOOKS

*Read Revelation 20:11–15*

Before the days of laptops and tablets; before videotapes, cassette recordings, and the typewriter; and even before the advent of the pencil or wood-pulp paper, governing officials employed dozens of scribes to record their exploits. Archaeologists have discovered thousands of clay tablets from ancient kingdoms detailing the people and events in their realms. The biblical book of Esther illustrates how important these written records could be.

On a night when the Persian king Xerxes could not sleep, “he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king” (Est. 6:1). The king learned for the first time that Mordecai, a Hebrew, had saved his life by exposing a plot to kill the king. Because Xerxes’s scribes had recorded Mordecai’s good deed, the king honored Mordecai and set into motion a God-directed chain of events that the Jewish people still celebrate today (see Est. 6:1—9:32 for this wonderful account of justice served).

Another King, the Bible says, will open His books one day and read out of them. That King is God Himself, or “the Ancient of Days,” as the prophet Daniel called Him (Dan. 7:9). Daniel saw a vision of “thousands upon thousands” of people standing before God, “and the books were opened” (Dan. 7:10). This is similar to the vision the apostle John recounted in Revelation,

a vision of the final judgment of the human race. In “the books” that John saw are recorded names and deeds, and in “the book of life” are recorded names only. “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15).

God is a King who will know the hearts and acts of all people at the end of time. His books will be opened, and deeds and names will—or will not—appear. Eternity in the presence of the King will belong only to those “whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27).

### God's Promise:

His books are complete and accurate, ready to be opened.

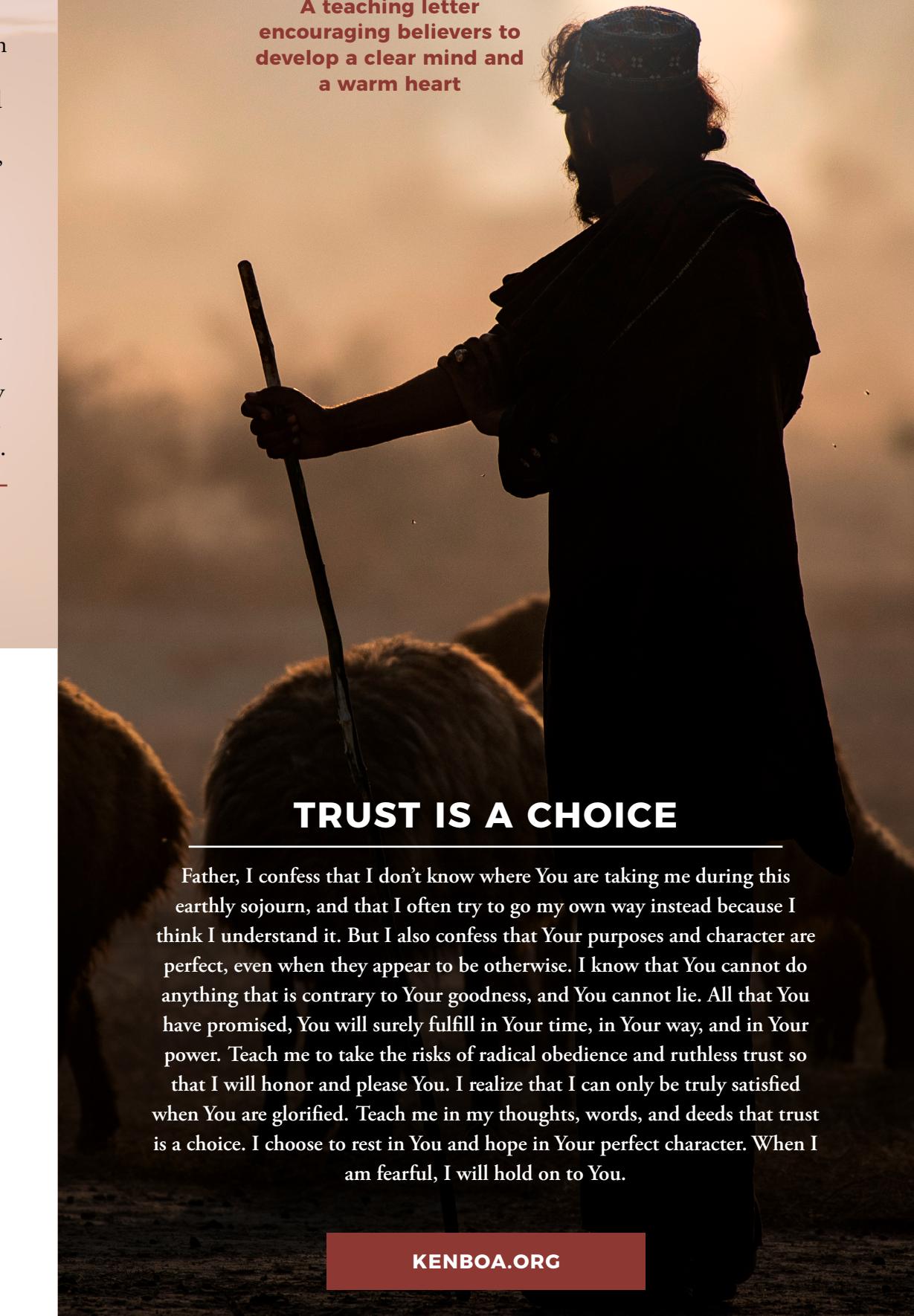
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## REFLECTIONS

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



### TRUST IS A CHOICE

Father, I confess that I don't know where You are taking me during this earthly sojourn, and that I often try to go my own way instead because I think I understand it. But I also confess that Your purposes and character are perfect, even when they appear to be otherwise. I know that You cannot do anything that is contrary to Your goodness, and You cannot lie. All that You have promised, You will surely fulfill in Your time, in Your way, and in Your power. Teach me to take the risks of radical obedience and ruthless trust so that I will honor and please You. I realize that I can only be truly satisfied when You are glorified. Teach me in my thoughts, words, and deeds that trust is a choice. I choose to rest in You and hope in Your perfect character. When I am fearful, I will hold on to You.

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# Psalm 23:3-4—A Shepherd Who Guides and Protects

In this second installment of a three-part series on Psalm 23, we will focus on verses 3-4.

## **“HE RESTORES MY SOUL” (v. 3a)**

All of us face times of defeat, frustration, hopelessness, bitterness, or despair. It is during these seasons of distress that our souls need to be restored. When David went through such a time, he wrote,

“Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance, and my God” (Ps. 42:11). In the King James Version (KJV), “despair” is translated “cast down,” an English shepherd’s term that describes a sheep with all four legs off the ground. In spite of its frantic efforts, a cast sheep is unable to right itself, and on a hot day, it can die in a matter of hours.

A good shepherd begins each day by counting members of the flock. Knowing that a cast sheep is

vulnerable to predators like vultures, dogs, and coyotes, the owner leaves everything to find a sheep that is lost or cast down. Because of His compassion and concern for us, our Good Shepherd seeks to rescue and restore us when we are immobilized. He is not furious and disgusted with us when we fall, but tender and patient.

Sheep may be cast in three basic ways: (1) looking for a soft spot, (2) too much wool, and (3) too fat. By analogy, we can be spiritually immobilized through self-indulgence, clinging to possessions and prestige, and to (misplaced) security and pride. We may not enjoy the measures our Lord uses to set us upright; however, to those who have been trained by divine discipline, “afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11).

## **“HE GUIDES ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME’S SAKE” (v. 3b)**

Without careful guidance, sheep can ravage an area by staying in the same pastures and trails until those lands are overgrazed, polluted, and infested with parasites. A competent shepherd discerns when it is time to rotate the flock to another pasture.

Like sheep, our lives also need direction because of our stubborn tendency to follow the followers along the same overworn and eroded trails. The problem is that we would rather assert our own way than follow the Shepherd, and this leads to remorse and degradation rather than the path of righteousness our Lord wants us to pursue.

To enjoy that path, we must be willing to forsake all to follow the Master (Mark 8:34–35). Instead of asserting our own wills, the mark of discipleship is to live a “Thy will be done” lifestyle. Instead of choosing our own way, we must be willing to do what the Lord Christ asks us to do. (See also Matt. 6:10; 26:42.)

## **“EVEN THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I FEAR NO EVIL, FOR YOU ARE WITH ME” (v. 4a)**

At this point in the psalm, it may be that David is alluding to the journey after winter and spring on the home ranch to the higher country of the summer range. More dangers and difficulties are associated with this territory, but the shepherd also knows it is beneficial for the sheep, and he is committed to protecting the flock. Just as the higher ground is reached by going through valleys, so the trials and disappointments of life may be the things our Shepherd uses to draw us to new dimensions of fellowship with Him.

The valley paths are the gentlest grades to the top, and they are often the best-watered routes with the richest forage. It is in the valleys of our lives that we are drawn closer to our Source of refreshment. Our Shepherd knows what He is doing when He leads us through this territory, and He is present with us just

as He has been faithful in the past.

## **“YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF, THEY COMFORT ME” (v. 4b)**

The rod is an extension of the shepherd’s right arm; in Scripture it became a symbol of power and authority. It is used in several ways: to defend the flock against predators, to discipline wandering sheep, and to examine and count the sheep.

Similarly, God’s powerful and authoritative Word defends us in times of temptation and spiritual attack, reproves us, and examines our hearts to expose things that need to be made right.

While the rod corresponds to the Word of God, the shepherd’s staff speaks of the Spirit of God. The shepherd uses the staff for several purposes: to draw the sheep together (e.g., to lift newborn lambs to their mothers when they get separated), to guide the sheep (especially along new paths), to give special attention and affection to members of the flock, and to rescue sheep when they cannot extricate themselves. The Spirit of God is our comforter and counselor who draws us into a close walk with the Shepherd and with other believers.

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